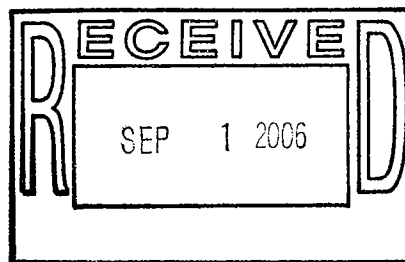




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August 28, 2006

Citizens' Health Care Working Group
7201 Wisconsin Avenue
Suite 575
Bethesda, MD 20814



Dear Members of the Working Group,

As chair of the Healthcare Access Committee at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Binghamton, NY, I am taking the opportunity to offer a few comments on the Citizens' Health Care Working Groups' interim Recommendations, updated on July 18, 2006. It is with gratitude and enthusiasm that I commend the group for the great work that is being accomplished in raising consciousness and formulating concrete recommendations regarding this critical societal issue of Health Care that Works for All Americans.

As a member of Ascension Health, we are proud to be part of a healthcare system that has recognized the need and targeted 100% access for the communities we serve. It is obvious, however, that we need to partner with other private and public providers if we are to make this goal a reality for our Nation. The work of the Citizens' Healthcare Working Group is definitely helped to move this agenda forward.

I respectfully offer the following comments on the six Recommendations:

1. Guarantee financial protection against very high health care costs.

There must be a mechanism for protecting individuals and families from financial disaster due to the extraordinary costs generated by serious illness and injury. There is need to define "high costs" in relation to personal income, etc.

2. Support integrated community health networks.

There is great need to develop funding sources for the formation of public/private initiatives to target specific vulnerable populations such as the huge number of uninsured Americans that slip through the cracks in our society. It is also important that we address the access issue for these populations in order that they can be assisted in navigating the complex healthcare system. Shared Information technology is also critical to reducing the duplication and lack of continuity that exists within the system.

3. Promote efforts to improve quality of care and efficiency.

Establishing and adhering to effective, proven standards of practice/care and the reduction of variability are critical to improving the quality of care in our Nation. We must work harder to eliminate racial/ethnic disparities. Sharing best practices within private and public health systems is an important and effective means of improving quality. Fully utilizing the

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available technology for electronic medical records and other safety initiatives needs to be part of our national effort.

4. Fundamentally restructure the way that palliative care, hospice care and other end-of-life services are financed and provided, so that people living with advanced incurable conditions have increased access to these services in the environment they choose.

Improving end-of-life care is of critical importance to improving not only the quality of living for persons and families, as they approach the end of their life, but also for controlling the often futile and costly care that has become such a common phenomenon in today's society. With the increase in prevalence of chronic disease as people live longer, Palliative Care Medicine must play a more central role in the plan of caring. Education of medical/nursing professionals needs to be a high priority for our healthcare system to become better prepared to meet the needs for Palliative Care Medicine. Palliative Care Medicine is an appropriate and effective way of intervening earlier in the course of serious, complex illnesses in order to improve the quality of life through symptom management. Palliative Care Medicine can also prepare individuals and families for earlier and more consistent utilization of Hospice programs.

5. It should be public policy that all Americans have affordable health care.


We believe that healthcare is a fundamental human right and as a nation we must put in place public policy that supports accessible and affordable healthcare. It is obvious that affordability is different for different people and so it will be necessary to put in place rationale definitions of affordability that meet the needs of various socio-economic groups.

6. Define a "core" benefit package for all Americans.

Determining core benefits is a critical task if we are to make healthcare effective for all Americans. Core benefits need to be comprehensive in order to meet the holistic needs of individuals and families. Prevention is also a key component if we are to improve the health of persons and decrease the cost of disease related interventions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Recommendations of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group, of which I am very supportive. This is a positive step in bringing together the best thinking of a large sampling of professional and community persons to vision the healthcare system for our Nation. I look forward to the final recommendations and pray that your work will be convincing and fruitful with our public policy makers.

Sincerely,



Sister Marilyn Perkins, DC, RN, MSN
Vice President, Mission Integration